
The Promise of the Holy Spirit

Sermon • Rev'd Andrew Hoggan • 10 May

Acts 1:1-5, John 14:15-21

Let's pray, Living Lord Jesus, open our hearts and minds that we might be receptive to your word, Amen.

There are times in life, especially when we face challenges, that we need encouragement to get us through. Very often that encouragement comes as someone stands with us. Just knowing that we are not going it alone can make all the difference in the world.

The other day I was talking to a parent of a young primary age girl. He was concerned, as many are, about some of the things going on in the world.

He asked me a question. What can a parent do to help their child prepare for whatever might come in life? I already know that faith development is an important priority for these parents, so I didn't go down that path. I simply said, the best thing anyone can do, is help their young one know that no matter what, someone is there for them.

As many parents, and or caregivers know, there might come the day when we see or hear things that have the potential to break our hearts. But knowing that there is always going to be someone in our corner, could well make the difference between a series of choices, being a stage, as compared a lifestyle.

When I was a youth worker way back in the 80's, I sometimes tried to encourage parents with the fact that most adolescents turn out OK eventually regain their sanity. It's a part of the frontal cortex not being fully developed till the mid 20's or something. I tried to remind myself of that at times when I had my own children.

Anyway, the answer I gave to the question asked of me might have seemed a bit out of context given the child in question is a decade or so away from being a teenager. But I figured having that mindset of "no matter what, I'm with you" is a great preparation for what might come as that young one hits adolescence, and all that sometimes comes with it.

Of course standing with someone does not mean constantly bailing them out. It does not mean enabling or babying them. It means come what may, I will never give up on you. It's a bit like us and God. God does not always bail us out.

But God is always there in our corner. Always wanting the best for us. The words of the prophet Jeremiah come to mind. God is speaking to an exiled people in captivity in Babylon. 29:11 "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." Prophetic words of hope in the most difficult of circumstances. It can make all the difference in the world to know that, no matter what, someone is standing in our corner.

In the context of our passage this morning, Jesus has given his disciples what must have seemed the worst news ever. He has spoken of his impending death. Now in ch 14-18 Jesus is preparing his disciples.

His disciples might well be thinking, "OK, so who is going to have our back." "Who is going to stand with us if Jesus is gone." "How are we going to cope?" In that context at the beginning of ch 14 Jesus talks of his going, in order that he might one day come back, and take them to be where he is. It's that well known passage we often use at funerals.

Further, just before our passage which begins vs 15, Jesus says in vs 12-13, "very truly I tell you the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do, and in fact will do greater works than these, because I'm going to the Father." "I will do whatever you ask in my name so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If in my name you ask me for anything I will do it."

We should ask the question, does this mean that being a Christian is kind of like living in a perpetual best Christmas ever. Does Jesus mean we will always get whatever our heart desires and whatever we ask for?

Lest Jesus words be interpreted as "whatever we ask, we get." The clarifying proviso of "in my name" and the explicit mention of "obeying the commandments" of Jesus that bookends the passage we look at today, helps us understand that yes, Jesus will answer our prayers, as we pray in accordance with his will, and in line with the commands of the gospel.

In that context, Jesus, though he is leaving, gives his disciples, the ones charged with a unique apostolic authority, encouragement as Jesus lays down foundational Gospel teaching concerning himself and the ongoing work.

Beyond the apostles, of course, we too are included in the encouragement Jesus gives in respect to the work of the Advocate and the ongoing work of the kingdom.

Do not let your hearts be troubled believe in God believe also in me. Ask me for anything I will do it. I will not leave you orphaned. I will ask the father he will give you another advocate to be with you forever.

So, can we trust Jesus word? Let's answer by looking at three of the big promises of Jesus.

- Firstly, the one Jesus made about his death and resurrection. Easter answers that.
- Secondly, his promise that after returning to his place of glory at the right hand of the Father, the Holy Spirit would be send to dwell with us and be with us forever. Pentecost fulfils that promise.
- Thirdly, the promise that Jesus will one day return.

Two of the three promises have been fulfilled in full. The third, is a future event in respect it being fully realised. But there is a sense that it is partially realised in the here and now, as Jesus dwells with us by his Spirit. Is Jesus true to his word? Can we trust him and the Gospel? It very much looks like it.

In the passage this morning three things are central.

- Love.
- Obedience to the commands of Jesus.
- The Advocate, the Spirit of truth.

Three points are made.

- The Father gives the Spirit as the Father gave Jesus.
- What the Father gives is ours forever.
- The Spirit of truth makes us one with God.

How does it work? Just as Jesus obeyed the Father, and that obedience was evidence of the love and unity between Father and Son, so we also are called to obedience and that obedience is evidence of our unity with the Father and Son. Further, through obedience and oneness, the work of Christ continues. Remember, the context just before our passage.

If we believe in him will do the works he does, in fact even greater works because he's going to the father. However, we can only do these greater works by the power of the Sprit. "If you love me you will keep my commandments and I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate or helper to be with you forever."

- Do we need the Spirit of God to be working in our midst?
Most certainly we do.

- Have we been assured as believers that we have the advocate the helper and this is a permanent forever thing?
Most certainly we have.
- Has this promise and assurance in any way been evidenced?
Most certainly it has.

And we will look more at that by way of encouragement as we begin a series on the book of Acts the week after Pentecost Sunday. It's very exciting stuff I promise you.

We could add 2000 plus years of church history. All that said, why then does it so often seem like nothing much is happening, and the Church of God is in retreat?

It helps to know that there are parts of the world where the Church is growing at an incredible rate. Even in the Western world, wherever the gospel is proclaimed and the Spirit of God is at work the church is growing.

"You're worried that I'm leaving" "you're wondering how you are going to cope" Jesus says to his disciples in the context of his impending death.

Very truly I tell you, you ain't seen nothing yet. The really awesome thing is, that you are going to continue the work. As long that is, as you are obedient to my word, and have the Advocate, the Spirit of truth.

Jesus is trying to help his apostolic band of followers understand the awesome reality that just as the Father and the Son are one. So too is the believer in Christ, one with the Father and Son.

Verse 18 "I will not leave you orphaned. I am coming to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you."

The first part of that passage points to Jesus physical presence with his disciples after his resurrection, and before his ascension. The second part of the promise, that part which talks of the oneness of the believer with God through the power and work of the advocate, the spirit of truth, applies to every believer. We would also have to note the link between living in the truth with the help of the advocate and being obedient to the commands of Jesus. We note they are called commands not options.

In closing. When we face challenges, especially the challenge of proclaiming and promoting the Gospel in our own culture, it can seem daunting for sure.

But we are assured in our passage that we are one with God, we have a helper, and we stand in, and on, the truth of the gospel.

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Truth is a key word in our passage this morning and in the one that we will look at next week as we unpack a little of ch 16.

We will see how for at least the last 30 or so years there has been a full on war against the very idea of there being a truth. It has to be said that on many fronts it looks a bit like the battle for truth is being lost.

At its heart this is a Spiritual matter. At its heart this wages a war with truth it is a continuation of what the Father of lies started in the garden of Eden. The assault on truth is really an assault against the Gospel, and the one who says "I am the way, the life and the truth".

Truth has a way of proving itself right though, and reality trumps fabrication eventually. That's all for next week as we unpack a little of Chapter 16 and the work of the Advocate the Spirit of truth in relation to sin, righteousness and judgement.

Let's pray, Lord Jesus, we thank you that you are always with us. We thank you that we can trust you to help us navigate the paths and challenges of life and lead us in the ways of truth and love, amen.